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ABSTRACT

The Total Physical Response (TPR) method of teaching languages, while found to be effective and theoretically interesting, appears to have limitations in some circumstances. In a British program of English as a second language, TPR was found to be useful only for teaching vocabulary and only at low levels; the language it produced (imperatives and responses to them) was not very useful to students in real-world situations. In addition, students were frustrated by not being allowed to speak. A sequence applying the approach to the common experience of shopping was developed, and a dialogue for which the students needed to learn only a few simple forms was devised. Another extension of TPR using simple past questions requiring only negative or affirmative answers and using prompting cards was also created. This technique combines effective features of TPR and an introduction to various tenses and lexical sets. The benefits of TPR are that the action enhances memory, the physical movement provides variety, there is maximum student practice, the paralinguistics are useful as cultural information, and it is an enjoyable activity. Examples of language sequences and illustrations are included in the text. (MSE)

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USING TPR COMMUNICATIVELY

by Terry Tomscha

Stand up
Walk
Turn around
Sit down

Many of you will recognise the above sequence of actions as a first lesson in 'Total Physical Response' more commonly referred to as TPR. Although the idea of using actions to teach language is not new, it has more recently been looked at from a theoretical point of view and thought to have a greater effect on learning than ever before appreciated. TPR, itself, is a word coined by Dr. James Asher, a psychologist at San Jose State University in California, USA, in 1964. He developed this approach to language learning based on child language acquisition theory and on 'brain lateralization' studies.

Language Acquisition in Children

There are three main points which are thought to play a major part in the language acquisition of children: (1) they receive 'comprehensible input' , largely in the form of commands from parents and others who interact with them; (2) they have the right to remain silent,that is they do not speak until they are ready or want to speak; (3) they learn language in a stress-free environment.

In the TPR approach students are initially shown a series of commands and then upon the teacher's request are asked to perform these commands. This means that students are given 'comprehensible input' (similar in form to commands given to them when they were learning their first language) which is practised and reinforced before they are asked or allowed to speak. By delaying speech production it is felt that students experience less stress than in the ordinary language classroom and when they do speak it is felt that they are ready to speak.

TPR Approach

During the first 12 hours of the course, the teacher demonstrates the new actions and illustrates the accompanying vocabulary through drawings or realia. Once the teacher has shown the students the commands the students are then asked to perform these commands. Throughout this presentation period there is continual revision so that there will be a minimum number of mistakes. The commands are given in random order and

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often mixed up so that novel commands are created from known vocabulary. In the fifth lesson the students are given the commands on slips of paper and asked to perform what they read. In this way reading is introduced into the approach without the teacher ever referring to the reading skill. Throughout this approach the teacher uses the blackboard, pictures, and real objects along with the mime extensively. TPR with pictures is exemplifed in this sequence:

> Draw a table on the blackboard.
> Erase one of the legs.
> Draw a vase of flowers on the table.

Here is an example with real objects (realia):

> Pick up a banana. (a plastic banana in a box)
> Imagine it's a telephone.
> Say 'hello'.

Often the commands are unusual and provoke laughter among the students. This is encouraged as it helps create a stress-free environment. It is also thought to help students relax, enjoy, and remember. The teacher's overall approach is to encourage enjoyment even if the classroom becomes a bit noisy. This is in fact considered to be a productive atmosphere.

After 12 hours of instruction, the students are allowed to give commands to each other. This phase is called 'role reversal'. Once the teachers have reached this stage, students are then encouraged to use whatever language they can when they want to. Once the role reversal stage is reached, production of new language can occur in the same lesson.It is important that new language is introduced slowly alongside continual revision to ensure full retention of the target language.

Brain Lateralization

In addition to the ideas on how children learn their first language, studies of how the brain operates when engaged in communication support TPR. Roger Sperry, a Nobel Prize winner from the USA, has done studies of the brain which indicate that the right and left hemisphere operate in totally different ways. Sperry suggests that the left hemisphere processes information in a linear, logical, and sequential way. It

appears to be 'critical', 'bossy', and intransigent' when faced with unknown or unfamiliar information. The right hemisphere, on the other hand, seems to be the 'tolerant','responsive' and'receptive' side of the brain. It processes ideas in a random sequence, and responds to pictures and movement. It favours physical ways of communication and is felt to be the centre of the brain for sign language for the deaf. By using TPR, Asher claims that we are avoiding lengthy explanations about the target language and the translation into the students native language. He says we are preventing interference of the dominant left hand side of the brain with TPR because the meaning is associated clearly with an action or movement: translation is unnecessary.

Although this is an oversimplification of a very complex theory, it does suggest that we learn movement and language together and that they may have a stronger link that we originally have thought.

First Lesson in TPR

A first lesson in TPR contains these commands and lexical items:

COMMANDS	SUPPORTING VOCABULARY		
Stand up	fast	slowly	twice
Sit down	stomach	head	table
Walk	chair	door	blackboard
Stop	floor		
Turn around			
Touch			

At the end of the first lesson, students are able to understand and perform simple commands as well as more complex ones such as these:

(1) Sit down on the chair slowly.
(2) Sit down on the floor fast.
(3) Walk to the table and sit on the table.

Gradually, and with additional revision, new lexical items and commands are added to this list. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate a variety of their own methods and techniques to support this approach particularly after the first 40 hours. Asher and his principle teacher, Ramiro Garcia, have created a 40-hour lesson approach in their book, 'Instructor's Notebook' or 'How To Apply TPR For Best Results'.

Limitations of TPR

When I was first introduced to this approach, I was interested in both the theory and the techniques which supported it. I tried it with several of my EFL classes, but found that it had limitations when applied to my own teaching situation:

(1) It was only useful for teaching vocabulary
(2) It seemed to be useful only for low levels
(3) The language it produced (imperatives) was not very useful in the 'real world'

In addition to these problems, there was student resistance to the fact that they were not allowed to speak but were only asked to listen and perform the commands. Since they had come to Britain to learn how to 'speak' English, they were disappointed to discover that I only required them to listen. A further problem evidenced itself in the type of language they were 'comprehending'. Once we did reach the 'role reversal' phase, they discovered that the language they were practising was of very little use when speaking to their landladies or trying to buy something in a shop.
With further experimentation, however, I found a way to use TPR as a means of presentation which could then be exploited to suit the 'communicative aim' of my EFL lessons.

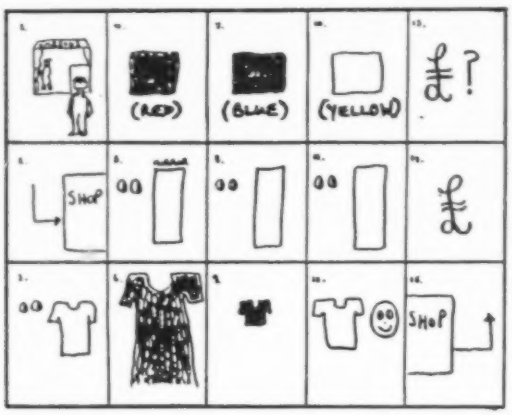
Exploitation of TPR

I first devised a sequence which I felt was useful to beginners and based on a common experience of 'shopping'. I then recorded the sequence onto a tape recorder for the initial phase of TPR.

You are shopping.
Go into a shop.
Look at the sweaters.
Try on a blue one.
Look in the mirror.
It's too big.
Try on a red one.
Look in the mirror.
It's too small.
Try on a yellow one.
It fits.
You like it.
Ask how much it is.
Pay for it.
Go out of the shop.

The exploitation is as follows:

1. Play the tape and act out the sequence for the students.
   (You may need to do this two or three times.)
2. Ask the students to enact the commands as you give them.
3. Mix up the commands to ensure comprehension.
4. Divide the class into pairs. Put the following cues on the board to help students remember the sequence.
   A gives the commands to B who enacts them. Then B gives the commands to A who enacts them.



5. When you are satisfied that the students can produce the commands for each other successfully, then show them the text.
6. Once they have read the text and understand all the lexis, then set up the following role play in a clothes shop. The teacher initially takes the role of the customer (B).

A: Good morning!
B: Good morning!
A: Can I LOOK AT THE SWEATERS?
B: Yes. (Here you are.)
A: Can I TRY ON A RED ONE?
B: Yes.
A: Can I LOOK IN THE MIRROR?
B: Yes. (Over there.)
A: IT'S TOO BIG. Can I TRY ON A BLUE ONE?
B: Yes.
A: IT'S TOO SMALL. Can I TRY ON A YELLOW ONE?
B; Yes.
A: IT FITS. How much is it?
B: £10
A: I'll take it.

If you look at the dialogue more closely you will notice that the capitalised parts of the exchange are exactly the same as the commands the students practised in the TPR presentation.All the students have to learn is to put a 'Can I' or 'Could I', in front of the imperative form and they will have a 'realistic' dialogue that would work if ever they found themselves in a clothes shop.

Once the students have seen the model, they can then practise their own dialogues in pairs before acting them out in front of the class. They can substitute items of clothing, colours, and prices if they want. It is also very helpful if you encourage the students to continue doing the actions when they practise their dialogues. Although this exchange may seem a bit contrived, it is a possible exchange and one that is far more satisfying than leaving students with the commands.

Extensions

This type of approach can be used with different structures in English and at different levels. This is because much of the English language is formed using the infinitive as its base. For example, the present simple, the 'going to' form, past simple 'yes'/'no' question forms, and any form that uses the modals. This indicates that there is probably a very strong case for using the 'imperatives' as a means of presentation.

Yes/No Questions

To show another extension of TPR, let's consider simple past question forms. First have the students learn this sequence:

> You are going away on holiday.
> Shut the windows.
> Lock the windows.
> Turn off the lights.
> Write a letter to the milkman.
> Write a note to the newsboy.
> Water the plants.

You can follow this sequence with a dialogue between a husband and wife, two flatmates, or a mother and child:

> A: Are you ready?
> B: Did you LOCK THE DOORS?
> A: Yes, I did.
> B: Did you CLOSE THE WINDOWS
> A: Yes, I did.
> B: Did you WATER THE PLANTS?
> A: Yes, I did/ No, I didn't.

To make this exchange more interesting, you could devise two role cards like the ones below. You can tick (✓) some of the items and cross (✗) some of the others so that it becomes a type of information gap exercise.

Card 1.

Lock windows.

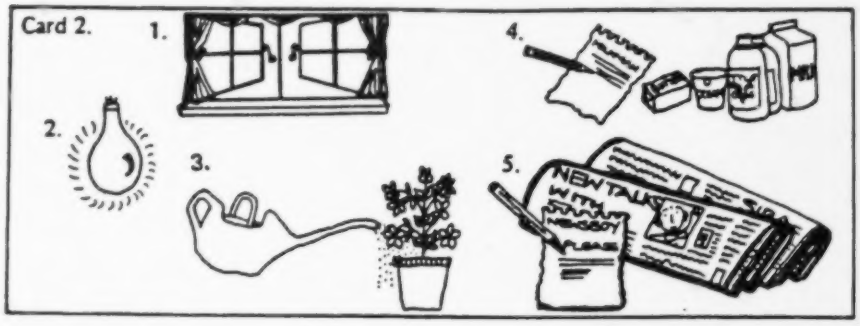
Turn off lights.

Water plants.

Write note to milkman.

Write note to newsboy.

Card 2.



Final Comments

Although TPR will not give you a 'complete' and 'thorough' presentation to language learning, it can be very useful as an initial introduction to various tenses and a variety of lexical sets. There are many benefits which accrue from using it with students:

1. Action does seem to help memory - particularly for students who do not have an aptitude for language learning.
2. Students enjoy the movement - it provides variety from a normal sitting position.
3. There is maximum student practice, particularly when students practise the commands in pairs.
4. The paralinguistics are useful for cultural information.
5. It is enjoyable.

Overall, TPR is a useful approach to integrate with your present teaching methods and can successfuly be exploited to provide students with realistic language which is fundamental to a language learning programme.